

How to Talk to the Ambivalent Young Voters

Tools and tips for speaking with reluctant, suburban, small-town, and rural voters ages 18–39.



What's this for?

Making a meaningful change has always meant getting young people involved, whether that's stopping wars, fighting for civil and human rights, or protecting the environment. And if you're reading this, that means you're energized and ready to take action. But unfortunately, not everyone feels the same way — especially younger voters in smaller towns and cities. They don't share your optimism or urgency. They don't believe they can make a difference, and they don't see why they should try.

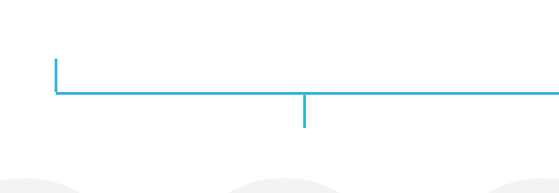
Convincing them otherwise requires a different approach. We've tested a bunch of messages and strategies for getting the Ambivalent Young Voters to pay attention to what you have to say, and we'd like to share the best of them with you.

Who are they?

There are more than 30 million Ambivalent Young Voters in the U.S. — that represents **63% of voters ages 18–39** outside major metropolitan areas.

The Ambivalent Young Voters

30 million
eligible voters in non-urban U.S.



65%
registered voters

Eligible voters from non-urban areas, ages 18–39.

Undecided, infrequent, and unmotivated voters.

Are not politically active, don't follow the news closely.

Open to voting across party lines.

What's on their minds?

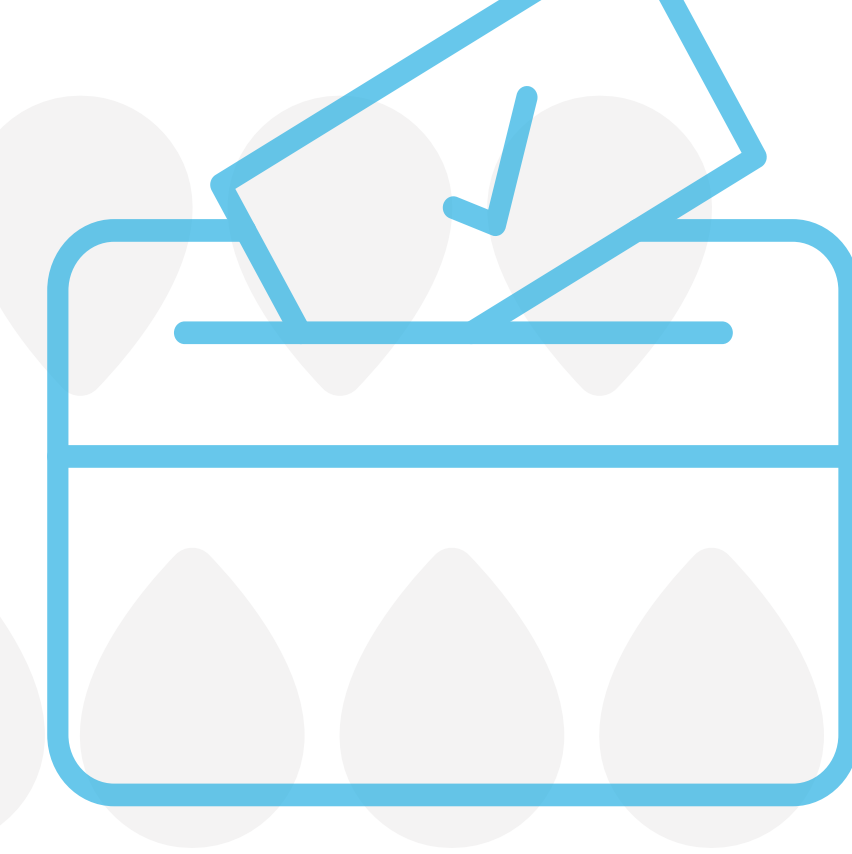
Don't follow the news, not active in politics

Only 28% have shared a political post on social media in the last six months.

They don't watch the news or read the "paper"; more than half get their news from social media.



They live in swing districts



Careful not to pick sides or get into arguments about politics.

Politics is seen as something that divides and creates conflict.

Have friends and family who vote for both parties.

Independent-minded

Consider themselves open-minded and independent.

Proudly not part of either party.

Want leaders who are willing to compromise to get things done.



What's going to get them going?

We should adjust our messages a bit when talking to Ambivalent Young Voters so they don't tune us out before first hearing what we're saying. Here's what our research found:

When They Go Low, We Go High

Insight: Taking the high ground and offering to work together across party lines stood out and impressed them.

✓ **Action:** Demonstrate your independence. Show them you are open-minded too, by making it clear that you are not affiliated with a political party. Talk about working together, regardless of political affiliation.

Keep Trump Out of This

Insight: Trump fatigue is real. The Ambivalent Young Voters are tired of the bickering and tired of Trump being a flashpoint for both parties.

✓ **Action:** Instead of blaming Trump, focus on the powerful interests that helped put him in the White House and want to keep him there. Talk about corporate greed and fossil fuel lobbyists.

Pollution as Proxy

Insight: Climate change was a loaded term, but our research shows that the Ambivalent Young Voters see pollution as nearly synonymous with climate change and far more impactful.

✓ **Action:** Use words like "soot" and "smog" to describe particulates and tie pollution to corporate greed and fossil fuel lobbyists.

The Deregulation Surprise

Insight: The people we met with were nearly universally surprised and disappointed to hear that pollution regulations had been relaxed under the Trump Administration.

✓ **Action:** Just state the facts in a nonpartisan way. Oil, gas, and coal companies have successfully lobbied to get protections rolled back. Need a list? [Look here.](#)

Green Prosperity

Insight: Environmental messages were much more interesting to the Ambivalent Young Voters when they were paired with an economic message.

✓ **Action:** Make it tangible. Talk about new jobs and saving on fuel bills or utilities. Show them how it could work and tell them we have the technology to do this today, if we elect people who will make it happen

Keep It Local, Personal

Insight: Understandably, when issues or opportunities are local or personal, the Ambivalent Young Voters are more likely to pay attention and get involved.

✓ **Action:** If you're talking about the economy say, "You'll save an average of \$15," instead of, "We'll save millions." Talk about jobs in their town and give local examples.

About this document: The insights and recommendations in this document come from primary research commissioned by Clean & Prosperous America with the goal of understanding what kinds of messages can motivate the target audience to vote for climate-friendly candidates. For more details on methodology or how to get involved, visit <https://cleanprosperousamerica.org/>.